
ATTENDEES

Nick Vira
Megan Stewart
Matt; WA DNR
Alan Walker
Mike Baden
Carl Delarosa
Julie Sackett
Tom Tebb
Tom Davis
Emmett Wild
Leslie Michael

Roylene Comes At Night
Robin Slate
Bonda Habet
Joe Williams
Corina Hayes
Jonathan George
David Ryan
Jeff Shott
Michael Crowder
Bill Blake
Stuart Crane

Sherrie Copeland
Rachel Maggi
Naomi Bendenfel
Janet Gorrell
George Nicholas
Robert Thompson
Michelle Hennings
Doug Rashden
Carlee Elkee
Amy Ryan
Jeff Shribel

Keith Griswold
Rod Hamilton
Courtney Naumann
Andrew Spaeth
Nicole Berg
Harold Crows
Rebecca Hanson
Ben Kindles
Chris Bon
Jennifer Boil
Lee Hammer

INTRODUCTION

Roylene disgusted the overview for this year:

New Conservation Desktop CART; has some bumps that we are still working out. The old version is now off-line and not available. National Headquarters have been working on the new version will have more effective tools. There will be updates on application process that Keith Griswold will discuss later in the meeting.

The Box/OneSpan is a method to allow for producers to digitally sign documents, all documents are now available on newfarmers.gov. Would like to see everyone using this as it is more reliable than FPAC tool for Producers with all three agencies, this will elevate issues and save time. FPAC will have a big push to go in this direction in August. A National Directive will be coming out soon.

CSP fund increased this year

Action:

Would like feedback on roll out for next year by June 26, 2020

STAC Wildlife Subcommittee Updates

Janet Gorrell, WDFW and Rachel Maggi, NRCS

State Biologist position has been re-awarded.

Desktop and Cart have been integrated.

The committee currently has 16 organizations represented but always looking for more.

Quarterly meetings – Last meeting held May 11th.

Recommendations from meeting:

1. FY21 Top 10 EQIP practices to receive 90% cost share: Replace practice 645 (Upland Wildlife Habitat Management) with practice 420 (Wildlife Habitat Planting).

2. **FY21 State Wildlife Fund Pool:** Increase ability to fund fish and wildlife habitat restoration or enhancement projects statewide by adding additional focus areas (see below).
 - Retain Salmon, Shellfish (Olympia Oyster), and T&E
 - Add Pollinators, with priority for Monarch habitat projects
 - Add Wildlife Migratory Corridors with emphasis on large ungulates but also allowing bird concentration areas for waterfowl and shorebirds
 - Add Tribal Culturally Significant Species

Action:

STAC committee to take consideration in pollinators when implementing 420 practice.

Roylene needs more clarification on the 645 vs 420 practice and her flexibility at the 90% level.

Any feedback, comments, or concerns regarding program delivery schedule proposal are to be sent to Nick Vira by June 26, 2020 he will pass them on to Keith Griswold.

LWG Reports

Nick Vira, NRCS State Partnership Liaison

Conservation Commission helped create an online polling survey tool for the working groups to gather data and report back to us. They were all had at least one or more facilitated teleconferences to discuss the feedback from the groups.

Additionally, they looked at areas of state initiatives, priority focal areas, watersheds, and any other agreement-type needs in their area. Each team had to identify their two local funding pools.

Everyone was asked to vote on resource concerns by land use at the micro-level. The main ones were water quality, plants, and soil quantity.

Action:

Roylene requested any suggestions that might help elevate issues as we prepare for Fiscal Year 2021, if we have another pandemic.

Roylene requested input for other tools that we could use to elevate the concerns that we have a lack of Resource Concerns in the current programs. Please send any suggestions to Nick Vira by June 26, 2020.

NRCS Programs Update – General

Keith Griswold, NRCS ASTC - Programs

Updates for contracts:

EQUIP 797 applications

- 197 Not Eligible/Cancelled/Differed
- 274 Pending
- 103 Eligible Low/Medium
- 223 Applications Pre-Approved/Approved
- 3 In Contract Status

CSP Multi Versions

GCI

- 4 Signed
- 15 Renewed Contracts

CSP Classic 218 applications

- 37 Pending/Cancelled/Not Eligible
 - 181 Eligible High/Medium/Low
- *The majority of the 181 were from the East Area

Next two weeks, we will be coming up on our deadline for all of the assessments and ranking needs to be completed. We have a national deadline for obligation of these classic applications of July 31, 2020.

RCPP – EQIP 111 applications

- 39 Pending/Cancelled/Not Eligible
- 72 Eligible

RCPP – CSP 11 applications

- 10 Eligible

EQIP and Easement timeline – RCPP and CSP are not part of this timeline as of now. In the process of working with our partners for fiscal year 2021.

By policy, we're required to put out the 30-day minimum announcement from the end of the sign-up period. Looking at the last days to collect Fiscal Year 21 applications at the end of the Federal FY. It would be announced on August 24th or earlier, trying to give as many days as possible beyond the minimum 30 day requirement.

Looking at pushing back the FSA eligibility requirements to November 20. So, this would be a full 50 days, 51 days past the sign-up period. This year because of our crunch timeline we had a last day of sign up and last day of eligibility on the same date. This year we're proposing a 50-day difference between the last day you sign up and then the last day of eligibility.

February 12, 2021 we're looking at this being the the last date to do screening, site visits, do a resource determination, and planning completed, along with the card assessment rankings and that information uploaded into DMS.

Then, from that determination, I would select the applicant or the applicants, and their individual contract item numbers or their confirmation practices to develop into a contract. I would have those selections done by March 3, 2021.

We are looking at the last day to get the Contract Development put up in DMS for the DC to be able to sign and basically complete all the contract development May 21, 2021.

QAR process (Quality Assurance Review) process as required by policy for a percentage of applications within each field office. Those would be submitted and reviewed giving that timeline a month and a half to complete, July 9, 2021. The last day for the Area Conservationists within each area to obligate that contract would be August 6, 2021.

We're looking at signing a cooperative agreement for completing or getting the WRE selections completed by August 27.

There are 192 active easements in the state, but we have a quantity of easements that we're in the process of trying to close out. Every year we add a new easement. Our status reviews are done each year.

For the ACEP-ALE easements, we do have extra points given to certain areas. Sentinel land has extra points. If they are within the Sage-Grouse priority areas, they get extra points. Also, those lands can receive a higher government payment for the easement portion instead of us paying 50% of the easement purchase, we can pay 75%.

Action:

Send all comments and questions to Nick Vira by June 26, 2020.

*NRCS Programs – ACTION NEEDED:
10 Conservation practices eligible to receive 90% F.A.
Geographic Priority Areas
Statewide Fund Pools*

Keith Griswold, NRCS ASTC – Programs

The top 10 basically what it allows is that no matter what application comes across for EQIP, that they would receive a 90% payment rate instead of the normal non-historically underserved payment rate. So, it doesn't matter what your status is. Everybody that's installing these practices would receive the higher payment rate.

- These practices must address these concerns:
- Impairment relating to excessive nutrients in groundwater or surface water
- Address the conservation of water to advance drought mitigation and declining aquifers
- Meet other environmental priorities and other priority resources concerns identified in habitat or other area restoration plans
- Or be geographically targeted to address a natural resource concern in a specific watershed

FY20 WA Top Ten Conservation Practices

- 369 Aquatic Organism Passage
- 645 Upland Wildlife Habitat Management
- 391 Riparian Forest Buffer
- 666 Forest Stand Improvement
- 612 Tree/Shrub Establishment
- 313 Waste Storage Facility
- 386 Field Border
- 340 Cover Crop
- 329 Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till
- 327 Conservation Cover

Geographic priority areas

We are waiting for headquarters to deliver information on how we can select geographic priority areas. It was a component or an opportunity added with the new Farm Bill. Select areas that either would screen higher than other applications or could have additional points added to it, if the applicant that the property resides within that geographic priority area, and it treats the resource concern identified for that priority area, would receive additional points.

Action:

Keith will check the STAC website to make sure the geographic areas for National Air Quality are listed.

Fiscal Year 2021 Fund Pool

National fund pools that we have to offer are listed below. Some of them have money provided to us. The organic ones are a National fund pool, we're required to have it, but they do not give us any additional money. That's why it says statewide. So, we put general EQIP funds in there. National Air Quality Incentive Program and the National Water Quality Incentive Program, and SGI programs also have National money so those monies can not be moved around to different fund pools. If the money

is not used, then it must be returned. Our main goal when we get these funds is to obligate contracts out of these first.

National Fund Pools – Required:

- National Organic & Organic – Transition (Statewide)
- National Air Quality (Forest, PM 10, PM2.5) (Specific Geographic Areas)
- National Water Quality Initiative – Monitoring
- National Water Quality Initiative – Watershed Implementation (Selected Watersheds)
- National Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) (Specific Geographic Areas)

We funded 50 high tunnel contracts this year, and have 38 cap developments this year, ranging from energy, forestry, irrigation, and nutrient management. With data collected from the LWG we would like to adopt a Statewide Soil Health Fund Pool program and be able to announce it for the FY21 for EQIP.

Action:

Any further questions or comments can be sent to Nick Vira by June 26, 2020 on the timelines.

*NRCS Conservation Agricultural Mentoring
Program (CAMP)*

Joe Williams, NRCS West Area Conservationist

NRCS created this field-based mentoring partnership program it's a state-driven partnership, and the intention is to build employee producer relationships within local communities.

This program is designed for the customer-facing employee who has fewer than basically 24 months of experience in the agency or has recently relocated to a different field office or a different area. This is an opportunity to build relationships with local producers in the local community and to develop their expertise in local production agriculture. The primary part is learning and relationship building locally.

NRCS will match producer volunteers with producers that are volunteering and willing to serve as mentors. The producer we're looking for, are folks that very passionate about conservation and teaching and sharing their experiences on the farm and in the community. NRCS think it's a great opportunity to provide a safe learning experience for their employees.

NRCS Washington State is one of 17 pilot states.

Action:

Contact Joe Williams if you have any questions about the program or have producers that may be interested in volunteering for this program.

Soil Health Committee

Joe Williams, NRCS West Area Conservationist

Washington State Conservation Commission and Joe Williams are working through our State Conservationist and with the current co-directors to look at potentially refocusing and formalizing an orderly committee.

Refocusing on the following:

- WA State passed new initiative SB6306, Soil Health

- New opportunities that have opened up
- Potential funding programs to promote Soil Health
- Where are the gaps that we can work on filling in
- Grants that are currently closing out
- Working on more structure and working with other agencies/partners

State Resource Conservationist Updates
Soil Health Strategy & Drought Impacts (wildfire, range forage, irrigation impacts, etc.)

Bonda Habets, NRCS State Resource Conservationist

- Farm Bill stressed soil health on cropland, rangeland, pastureland and forest land. The Strategy addresses continued operations and provides additions.
- Create a Producer Soil Health Committee to assist NRCS staff
- WA Plant Material Program will continue to be the Soil Health contact for WA NRCS
- WA NRCS Soil Health Strategy will bolster the State of WA Soil Health Initiative that was recently passed.
- Joe Williams, West Area Conservationist will be sitting on the State of WA Soil Health Advisory Committee to represent WA NRCS
- *NRCS Pullman Plant Material Program Manager was awarded the National Outstanding Employee award for his efforts in advancing Soil Health in WA.
- *While completing site visits for the National Resource Inventory (NRI) in south central WA end of April, signs of drought was readily apparent.
- We have encouraged producers to think of stockpiling forage as cows may come off the pastures early this summer. Drought also increases wildfire risks and irrigation water shortages.
- *Two National Technical Notes for Nutrient Management were posted to the STAC website, focusing on Feed Management and Nutrient Management with Dairies.
- *WA NRCS staff is continuing to advance through the Certified Planner curriculum, so all Planners are certified by January 2020. Conservation District Planners are also advancing as well as a few WDFW biologists.
- *NRCS catalog of Trainings was sent out to capture training requests in the fiscal year (FY21) Training Needs Inventory database. These include classroom, webinar, and Conferences.
- The Farmbill had 100% NRCS Conservation Practices reviewed by an outside University and Scientists for scientific integrity. Over half of these have gone on the Federal Register, inviting public comment. A State has one year to adopt this new Standard. WA NRCS adopts them by October for the new fiscal year.
- State Biologist and State Agronomist positions are still vacant but hiring actions in the system. With the addition and changes to 13 resource concerns, there may be significant changes to the Standards and to the payment scenarios. We expect the first batch in August. We will then prioritize to the most common used. Typically they are updated on a five year cycle, a manageable schedule.
- NRCS will now be doing 100% status reviews on all CRP contracts within 12 months of their expiration date. This impacts Eastern WA greatly.
- There were about 1350 CRP contracts, awarded in March 2020. NRCS is to review, sign and submit to FSA by early September. NRCS has task orders with several Conservation Districts to assist with this workload. The workload will be similar in the next few years.
- Douglas County will be open for CRP enrollments in 2022 due to the vast amount of contracts expiring.

- Discussion on how a priority can be given to those acres impacting Sage Grouse habitat. WA Congressional staff are looking into this concern.
- *WA NRCS will be updating their website for Highly Erodible Lands (HEL) Compliance and Wetland Compliance. The 1985 Farmbill required every producer to have a HEL conservation plan demonstrating how their approved crop rotation and residue management would protect their soils from soil erosion; wind water gully, this is NRCS only regulatory Program. HELC and HELC compliance is mandatory for every Farmbill Program and Risk Management Agency crop insurance.
- Residue and Tillage Management -Reduced Tillage conservation practice is the most relevant Conservation Practice; requiring little soil disturbance. Any time a plow shovel, or rod-weeder goes through the soil, it cuts the residue in pieces, buries residue and makes it susceptible to wind and water erosion with the soil no longer anchored by crop roots.
- With lack of staff, WA NRCS isn't looking to take on any new State Initiatives; but discussions will begin in FY 2021 on Prescribe Burn to plan for FY22 implementation.

Partner Update: CRP SAFE Acres Project Proposals

Janet Gorrell, WDFW & Rod Hamilton, FSA

Focused on conserving/restoring habitat for wildlife

Seed mixes feature mostly native species with high species diversity

3 grasses, 3 forbs, and 1 shrub/tree

Clean seedbed critical to success

Typically employ a two-stage seeding

- 1 year fallow
- Plant grasses in fall
- Inter-seed forbs following fall giving it time to manage the broadleaf weeds
- Multiple management treatments to help control weeds during native plant establishment

Shrubsteppe Safe change proposed:

Boundary adjustments:

- Will increase habitat connectivity between Douglas and Lincoln Counties
- Promote connectivity between Sage Grouse Initiative land easement and the prior Sage and
- Sharp-tailed grouse SAFE area
- Connect SAFE in Douglas and Okanogan Counties
- Add Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit, pollinators, and mule deer as focal species

Eliminate the Columbia Basin SAFE due to low enrollment

Maintain Ferruginous Hawk and Palouse Prairie SAFEs - no changes but will meet the requirements of the CRP – 897

All CRP from original SAFE proposal to remain the same and no new CRP practices

Maintain prohibition of haying and grazing on SAFE practices

Columbia Basin SAFE:

Low enrollments and few allotted acres request to discontinue the program due to lack of interest and availability of CP33 practice.

Action:

Contact Mike Kuttel Jr. at Micheal.KuttelJr@dfw.wa.gov or 360-520-3984 for responses to make changes.

Partner Update: Farms Under Threat in WA

Courtney Naumann, American Farmland Trust

AFT's PNW response to Farms Under Threat:

Leveraging the National Ag Land Network

- State specific FUT webinars (Contact for webinar information)
- Ongoing training and peer to peer learning

Provide leadership in key locations

Protect more farmland ourselves by leveraging new partnerships with the Conservation Fund

Support transfer of land to a new more diverse generation

Advocate for stronger local and state policies; WA food policy forum

Research-based decision making; Seek out opportunities to build on FUT with country-level analysis

AFT approach

- Identify Threats to Ag land
- Informed policy making
- Analyze
- On-ground protection

Spatial Modeling approach

- Map land use
- Identify best Ag land
- Map conservation of Ag land to development
- Use PVR (Productivity, Versatility, and Resiliency)

Development threatens our "Best Ag Land"

- 54% of WA land converted was the States best land
- 31% of WA land converted was Nationally Significant

Ag Land Protection Score Card

- Assess State efforts
- Focus on 6 approaches
- Rates each State * WA was one of the highest Policy response scoring 42 of out 100

Contact information:

Courtney Naumann, Agricultural Stewardship Program Manager, cnamann@farmland.org or 1-800-370-4879

Explore the maps and scorecards at: www.farmland.org/farmsunderthreat

Partner Update: WA's Forest Action Plan

Andrew Spaeth, DNR

This action plan is the roadmap to implement shared Stewardship investment strategy, builds on and reinforces agency commitment to existing plans and strategies, and to establish foundation for focused and coordinated planning and implementation in priority landscapes across the state.

Types of Cooperative Forestry Programs available:

- Community Forestry and Open Space
- Cooperative Lands – Forest Health Management
- Forest Legacy

- Forest Stewardship
- Landscape Scale Restoration
- State Fire Assistance
- Urban and Community Forestry
- Volunteer Fire Assistance

2020 Forest Action Plan

1. Align Strategies, goals, and priority actions across DNR programs and with our partners
2. Reinforce DNR commitment to existing strategic plans and clarify the linkages between current plans
3. Identify geographic priorities for Shared Stewardship in Western Washington

Forest Action Plan:

1. Landscape Resilience
2. Community Wildfire Preparedness and Wildfire Suppression
3. Keeping Forests as Forests: Risk of Conversion to Non-forest Uses
4. Urban and Community Forest Resilience
5. Rural Economic Development
6. Stewardship of Family and Working Forests
7. Wildlife and Salmon Recovery
8. Water Quality and Quantity

Washington and Idaho Forest Health Priority Landscapes

- Shared Stewardship Priority Areas
- Leverage Federal resources to accelerate forest health treatments
- Focus on Federal and non-industrial private forestlands

Landscape resilience indicators:

- Drought vulnerability = Moisture Deficit
- Climate = Dissimilarity Index
- Water Quality/Habitat Integrity = Fish Habitat Index
- Biodiversity = Habitat Connectivity
- Productivity = Site Class

Locations of things we care about:

Fish and Wildlife – WDFW Occurrence Data

Drinking Water – Forests to Faucets

Rare and Unique Habitats – Ecological Systems of Concern

Timber – Merchantable Accessible Volume

Small Forest Landowners – SFLO 2012

Carbon – Above Ground Biomass

Meeting Adjourned